

Raika

Theme 1:

Introducing Baha'i beliefs into our conversations on current issues

Workshop :

Organic Growth of the Faith

Everything in life, in its inception, is not known to the full extent of its potentiality. Development and progress is gradual. For example, ... if he takes a grain, and observes that it is growing, he can rest assured that the growing seed shall ere long become a tree. Now is the beginning of the manifestation of the spiritual power, and surely day by day its potency will assume greater and greater proportions. Therefore this twentieth century is the beginning or dawn of the spiritual illumination, and it is evident that day by day it will advance.

we would believe that the prog

Among the results of the manifestation of the spiritual forces will be: that the human world shall take on a new social form; the justice of God will become manifest: human equality will be established.

(Compilations, Baha'i Scriptures, p. 319)

The humanitarian and spiritual principles enunciated decades ago in the darkest East by Baha'u'llah and moulded by Him into a coherent scheme are one after the other being taken by a world unconscious of their source as the marks of progressive civilization.

for ex. compulsory Edu. equality between men and women

(Shoghi Effendi, The Dawn-Breakers, p. xxxvi)

A concept that showed itself strongly in the Guardian's writings was the organic metaphor in which Baha'u'llah, and subsequently 'Abdu'l-Baha, had captured the millennia-long process that has carried humanity to this culminating point in its collective history. That image was the analogy that can be drawn between, on the one hand, the stages by which human society has been gradually organized and integrated, and, on the other, the process by which each human being slowly develops out of the limitations of infantile existence into the powers of maturity. It appears prominently in several of Shoghi Effendi's writings on the transformation taking place in our time:

for ex. the baby, infant, youth, adult, adulthood, man

The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood.

is the sign of adolescence of human being

(Commissioned by The Universal House of Justice, Century of Light)

The principle of the Oneness of Mankind - the pivot round which all the teachings of Baha'u'llah revolve... implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.

(Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 42)

His Cause... stands identified with, and revolves around, the principle of the organic unity of mankind as representing the consummation of the whole process of human evolution.

(Shoghi Effendi, Summary Statement - The World Religion)

Progress is of two kinds, material and spiritual. The former is attained through observation of the surrounding existence and constitutes the foundation of civilization. Spiritual progress is through the breaths of the Holy Spirit and is the awakening of the conscious soul of man to perceive the reality of divinity. Material progress insures the happiness of the human world. Spiritual progress insures the happiness and eternal continuance of the soul.

(Abdul-Baha, Baha'i World Faith - Abdu'l-Baha Section, p. 227)

When the masses of mankind are awakened and enter the Faith of God, a new process is set in motion and the growth of a new civilization begins.

(Compilations, NSA USA - Developing Distinctive Baha'i Communities)

The prophets of God have founded the laws of divine civilization. They have been the root and fundamental source of all knowledge.

(Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith - Abdu'l-Baha Section, p. 227)

"In the midst of a civilization torn by strifes and enfeebled by materialism, the people of Baha are building a new world. We face at this time opportunities and responsibilities of vast magnitude and great urgency. Let each believer in his inmost heart resolve not to be seduced by the ephemeral allurements of the society around him nor to be drawn into its ^{fitful} and short-lived enthusiasms, but instead to transfer all he can from the old world to that new one which is the vision of his longing and will be the fruit of his labours."

(Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 135)

Bahá'is see education in terms of the Knowledge, qualities, skills, attitudes, and capacities that enable individuals to become conscious subjects of their own growth, and active, responsible participants in a systematic process of building a new world order.

(Baha'i International Community, 1990 Mar 09, New Delivery Systems for Basic Education)

some who is critically negative
In these days when people are so skeptical about religion and look with so much contempt towards religious organizations and movements, there seems to be more need than ever for our young Baha'is to be well-equipped intellectually, so that they may be in a position to present the Message in a befitting way, and in a manner that would convince every unbiased observer of the effectiveness and power of the Teachings.

(From a letter dated 5 May 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

The Aim of Education

The oneness of Humanity is a fundamental principle of Baha'u'llah teachings. Consciousness of it is a primary purpose of all Baha'i educational programs. This universal law is essential to the unity of humankind.

(Abdu'l-Baha, The promulgation of Universal Peace p 300)

...Baha'u'llah considered education as one of the most fundamental factors of a true civilization. This education, however, in order to be adequate and fruitful, should be comprehensive in nature and should take into consideration not only the physical and the intellectual side of man but also his spiritual and ethical aspects.

(From a Letter Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi 9 July 1931 to an individual believer)

We had heard through various channels the wonderful way your children had grown to speak about the Cause in public. Shoghi Effendi's hope is that they will...become able and devoted speakers on the Cause and subjects akin to it. To do this properly they will need a firm foundation of scientific and literary training which fortunately they are obtaining. It is just as important for the Baha'i young boys and girls to become properly educated in colleges of high standing as it is to be spiritually developed. The mental as well as the spiritual side of the youth has to be developed before he can serve the Cause efficiently.

(From a Letter Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi 28 November 1926 to an individual believer)

...education should lead to the discovery and perfection of one's capabilities and instill a commitment to serve the best interests of the community and the world as a whole. These two fundamental goals of education are inextricably linked because one unleashes and the other channels the power to transform the world.

(Baha'i International Community, 1990 Mar 07, Education of Girls Constraints Policy Measures)

The purpose of education is to give the individual mastery over himself, a creative relationship with society and understanding of his place in the universe. Education deals with the whole man: his mind, his emotions and his will. Distinctions now existing between the education of culture, the education of science and technique, the education of citizenship and the education of faith produce incomplete and unbalanced personalities.

(Baha'i International Community, 1947 Feb, A Baha'i Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights)

True Understanding

This is the day whereon all peoples should shed the light of unity and concord. [n brief, the pride and vanity of certain of the peoples of the world have made havoc of true understanding, and laid waste the home of justice and of equity.

(Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 76)

We cherish the hope that through the loving-kindness of the All-Wise, the All-Knowing, obscuring dust may be dispelled and the power of perception enhanced, that the people may discover the purpose for which they have been called into being. In this Day whatsoever serveth to reduce blindness and to increase vision is worthy of consideration. This vision acteth as the agent and guide for true knowledge. Indeed in the estimation of men of wisdom keenness of understanding is due to keenness of vision. The people of Baha must under all circumstances observe that which is meet and seemly and exhort the people accordingly.

(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 35)

Study the sciences, acquire more and more knowledge. Assuredly one may learn to the end of one's life! Use your knowledge always for the benefit of others; so may war cease on the face of this beautiful earth, and a glorious edifice of peace and concord be raised. Strive that your high ideals may be realized in the Kingdom of God on earth, as they will be in Heaven.

(Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 43)

We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge; and yet behold how ye have allowed your learning to shut you out, as by a veil, from Him Who is the Dayspring of this Light, through Whom every hidden thing hath been revealed.

(Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 129)

Social Transformation

It is apparent that the crisis of contemporary civilization is impelling thinkers in many lands to explore new scholarly methodologies capable of coming to grips with spiritual, moral, cultural, and social phenomena not hitherto encountered. No segment of humanity is so well equipped as the Baha'i community to take a leading role in this effort. As a body of people who are being steadily freed by the Revelation of Baha'u'llah from the "gravitational pull", so to speak, of the cultures in which their habits of mind have been formed, the community already has a unique approach to the exploration of reality. This approach needs to be sharply honed as an ever more effective instrument of social transformation. The devising of the new scholarly paradigm called for by this circumstance offers a priceless opportunity of service and achievement to those Baha'is who enjoy the dual gifts of spiritual faith and intellectual faculties trained in the best that contemporary society has to offer.

(The Universal House of Justice, 1997 Jul 20, Scholarship and Related Subjects)

Investigation of Truth

As you well understand, not only the right but also the responsibility of each believer to explore truth for himself or herself are fundamental to the Baha'i teachings. This principle is an integral feature of the coming of age of humankind, inseparable from the social transformation to which Baha'u'llah is calling the peoples of the world. It is as relevant to specifically scholarly activity as it is to the rest of spiritual and intellectual life. Every human being is ultimately responsible to God for the use which he or she makes of these possibilities; conscience is never to be coerced, whether by other individuals or institutions.

(The Universal House of Justice, 1992 Dec 10, Issues Related to Study Compilation)

Therefore, we learn that nearness to God is possible through devotion to Him, through entrance into the Kingdom and service to humanity; it is attained by unity with mankind and through loving-kindness to all; it is dependent upon investigation of truth, acquisition of praiseworthy virtues, service in the cause of universal peace and personal sanctification.

(Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 148)

We can, however, and it is our bounden duty to seek to derive fresh inspiration and added sustenance as we labor for the propagation of His Faith through a clearer apprehension of the truths it enshrines and the principles on which it is based.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 100)

Purpose

"... It is in intellectual circles such as this [a university circle] that the believers should endeavor to teach, confident that no matter how limited their capacity may be, yet their efforts are continually guided and reinforced from on high. This spirit of confident hope, of cheerful courage, and of undaunted enthusiasm in itself, irrespective of any tangible results which it may procure, can alone insure the ultimate success of our teaching efforts."

(From a letter dated 31 October 1936 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

Nowhere doth your true and abiding glory reside except in your firm adherence unto the precepts of God, your wholehearted observance of His laws, your resolution to see that they do not remain unenforced, and to pursue steadfastly the right course....

(Baha'u'llah, *The Proclamation of Baha'u'llah*, p. 10)

The fruits of the tree of man have ever been and are goodly deeds and a praiseworthy character. Withhold not these fruits from the heedless. If they be accepted, your end is attained, and the purpose of life achieved. If not, leave them in their pastime of vain disputes.

(Baha'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 25)

Furthermore, those who enter the Faith must be integrated into vibrant local communities, characterized by tolerance and love and guided by a strong sense of purpose and collective will, environments in which the capacities of all components - men, women, youth and children — are developed and their powers multiplied in unified action.

(The Universal House of Justice, *Ridvan 153*, 1995 December 26, p. 2)

In its affirmation of the validity of the great religions of the past, the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* reiterates those eternal truths enunciated by all the Divine Messengers the unity of God, love of one's neighbour, and the moral purpose of earthly life.

(The Universal House of Justice, 1992 Preface to the *Aqdas*)

Service

... nearness to God is possible through devotion to Him, through entrance into the Kingdom and service to humanity; it is attained by unity with mankind and through loving-kindness to all; it is dependent upon investigation of truth, acquisition of praiseworthy virtues, service in the cause of universal peace and personal sanctification.

(Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 148)

At the heart of the Baha'i perspective on popular participation in development is an equally challenging conception of the nature and purpose of human existence. In the Baha'i view, man is neither a fallen creature nor merely the product of socio-economic forces. The rational soul, in the Baha'i view, is a phenomenon with limitless potentialities: intellectual, spiritual, emotional and moral. Service to humanity is among the primary influences unlocking individual capacity.

Within this context, the Baha'i International Community views popular participation as essential to development and to the full realization of all human rights. We believe that education in the principle of service to humanity will arouse and maintain motivation which, coupled with the acquisition of practical skills and technology, will open as yet unimagined possibilities for development within and among nations.

(Baha'i International Community, 1989 Feb 09, Right to Development)

Praise be to God! the mediaeval ages of darkness have passed away and this century of radiance has dawned, — this century wherein the reality of things is becoming evident, — wherein science is penetrating the mysteries of the universe, the oneness of the world of humanity is being established and service to mankind is the paramount motive of all existence.

(Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith - Abdu'l-Baha Section, p. 279)

May you all persevere in your individual efforts to teach the Faith, but with added zest, to study the Writings, but with greater earnestness. May you pursue your education and training for future service to mankind, offering as much (your free time as possible) to activities on behalf of the Cause.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Baha'i youth of the world, January 1984)

We Baha'is, we who have answered His call, bear the responsibility of carrying forward His work among mankind, and in spite of our innumerable failings His plan is irresistibly progressing. The great tragedy of mankind at this time is the failure of the vast majority of human beings to heed the Divine Call, and this is in large part occasioned by the failure of most of those who have believed to live up to the high standard that Baha'u'llah has set. This is the condition in which we must work in our service to mankind, turning a sin-covering eye to the faults of others, and striving in our own inmost selves to purify our lives in accordance with the divine Teachings.

(*The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986, p. 498*)

Spirituality

Know, O thou possessors of insight, that true spirituality is like unto a lake of clear water which reflects the divine

(Abdu'l-Baha, *Abdu'l-Baha in London, p. 107*)

"The thing the ... believers must do is to deepen themselves in the Covenants of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. Mere intellectual understanding of the Teachings is not enough. Deep spirituality is essential, and the foundation of true spirituality is steadfastness in the Covenant."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 31, 1949)

The problem with which you are faced is one which concerns and seriously puzzles many of our present-day youth. How to attain spirituality is indeed a question to which every young man and woman must sooner or later try to find a satisfactory answer. It is precisely because no such satisfactory answer has been given or found, that the modern youth finds itself bewildered, and is being consequently carried away by the materialistic forces that are so powerfully undermining the foundations of man's moral and spiritual life.

"Indeed the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is the lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind that people in general do no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence. There is not sufficient demand for things that we call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence.

"The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual in its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man's outlook on life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit.

"It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has fallen, that religion seeks to improve and transform. For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites Man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Baha'u'llah has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer merely to accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality which he can acquire chiefly by means of prayer. The Baha'i Faith, like all other Divine Religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man which has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide.

(Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 86)

Theme 1:

Introducing Baha'i beliefs into our conversations on current issues

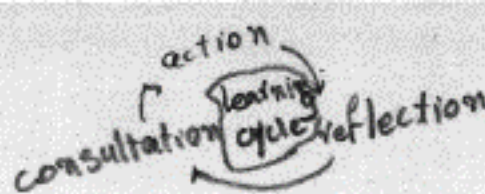
Workshop : Evolving Conceptual Framework

In this section we explore the idea of an evolving conceptual framework within which one studies, acts, reflects on one's actions, and learns how to contribute to the transformation of society. What does it mean to carry out study, action and reflection within a given conceptual framework? What does it mean for this framework to be evolving?

There are numerous people in this world who cherish the ideals of a good society-peaceful, just, and conducive to prosperity for all. The majority, however, never succeed in translating their ideals into action in a meaningful way.¹ Many are those who take note of the negative forces working within society but never go beyond criticizing them. They dream of a better world, yet go about the business of life as any conformist, simply trying their best not to commit that which brings harm to others. There are, of course, a significant number of people who are not content with passive criticism.² Of these, some fall into frantic activism, participate in any project that seems to address one or another of the ills of society, and affiliate themselves with any group whose ideas they find attractive.³ Others join the social or political movement that, for the moment, shows the greatest promise. The majority of these gradually adopt the platform for change promoted by the movement in its totality, and accept and become staunch defenders of its ideology. While there is nothing wrong with having a consistent ideology, those who follow this path often become close-minded and tend to forget the very purpose for which they initially joined the movement. Victory over other ideologies becomes an end in itself. Fanaticism takes over and the very ideals of peace, justice and prosperity for all end up being sacrificed in the struggle for power.⁴ Yet another sizable group of people find themselves incapable of commitment to action and dedicate themselves to endless study. They study competing ideological positions, become engaged in the intellectual advancement and promotion of one, or adopt the rather cynical position of analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of all, ever ready to expose the reasons for the failure of every plan of action.

Any position we adopt towards social transformation would, of course, have many of the above elements. We must dream of a better world, we must assume a critical posture when we examine the systems and processes of today's society, we must study, we must collaborate with movements that try to improve the human condition, and we must act energetically and with diligence. Our dreams about humanity's future are extremely optimistic. Our convictions about the nature of the society we wish to build are strong and we see no need to hide the elements of our belief system, our principles and ideals which are all explicitly expressed and promoted. Yet, when it comes to plans and projects, in spite of profound faith in the efficacy of the teachings we have embraced, we do not feel that we have a simple formula for action. To translate our principles into action and make our ideals a reality is something we have to learn. We exert our utmost, then, to approach our endeavors to transform society with a learning attitude. We try to study, to act, and to reflect on our action within a framework which, itself, is gradually constructed. As we advance in this learning process we need to ensure that each of the following occurs:

- Our perception of the reality with which we interact should become more and more accurate and well founded.
- Our vision of the opportunities before us, of the goals and objectives we set for ourselves, and of how to go about achieving them, should become broader and sharper.
- Our resolve to pursue our goals should become stronger and stronger.
- The framework within which we act should become more elaborate and more consistent.



improve our goals

- The way we approach action should become better defined and more realistic, and the methods we use to pursue our aims should become increasingly more effective.

We have described these points in one of the texts of our program Intellectual Preparation for Social Action. It is worthwhile to examine a couple of paragraphs from that text about the concept of an evolving framework, which are reproduced here for the sake of convenience:

To create his work of art, the artist first sets up a frame and defines the space within which his brush can move, translating his vision into reality. An edifice is erected within a frame that defines the available space and indicates how the envisioned elements of the edifice can take shape. As a tree grows, a clear frame appears upon which the leaves, blossoms and fruits are to flourish. Life manifests itself through numerous species, the members of each of which grow and develop according to a pattern that has evolved over millions of years. Leading a creative life of initiative also implies that you work within a framework which defines the social and mental space available and permissible to you and which disciplines your movements. Your assumptions, your ideals, the way you interpret the world around you, your aims, your values, your approach to life are but a few of the elements that form the framework of your endeavors.

the role of knowledge - (science and religion)

The framework within which you work cannot be rigid and fixed, like that of an edifice. Your projects should find in life itself examples to follow; they should grow organically as you learn and gain experience. The framework of your initiatives must evolve over the years, but even when it is incomplete it must hold your actions together and give your movements direction. You cannot believe in one thing and do the opposite. You cannot sacrifice your ideals in the name of practicality. You cannot abandon your purpose to serve humankind whenever it appears profitable to do so. You cannot cherish freedom and engage in initiatives that enslave others, utilize unjust means presumably to bring about justice, believe in cooperation yet foster competition, or be a defender of family values and promote promiscuity in your business. You should be consistent in your ways and should ensure that the elements of your belief system are consistent with one another.

unchaste

In that same text, it was also mentioned that the elements of a conceptual framework for social action may be divided into several categories:

1. Your beliefs about fundamental issues of existence will constitute one category of elements of your framework. The nature of man, the nature of society, the purpose of life, the way God guides history and the evolution of humanity are examples of such beliefs.
2. Closely related to the above are your views on the role knowledge plays both in the life of the individual and in the development of society. Examples of elements in this category are: your view on science and religion and their contributions to human progress; your outlook on education; your criteria for determining the validity of the constant stream of information you receive from varied sources; the degree of objectivity you seek in ascertaining facts; your attitude towards technology; and the way you go about familiarizing yourself with new technologies and making decisions about their use.
3. The principles that govern your life constitute another component of the framework of your endeavors. A similar category consists of your values. What you consider most important to seek in life—comfort, money, adventure, tranquility, a good family life, knowledge, opportunities to serve others, prestige, power, excellence; the value you place on such attributes as justice, love, generosity, and sincerity; the importance you give to friendship; the degree to which service to

humanity motivates your life—these are just a few examples of a large set of beliefs and attitudes that form your system of values, a significant aspect of the framework that guides your actions.

4. A more subtle aspect of the framework within which you act has to do with the approaches and methods you are likely to adopt for your actions. Whether you seek to be the center of all activities in which you participate or devote your energies to facilitating harmonious group action; whether you work alone or tend to collaborate with others; whether you need to be in control of everything or are willing to bow to group decisions; whether you create around you an atmosphere of competition or foster cooperation; whether you set rigid goals and drive yourself to achieve them or allow your actions to benefit from constant and systematic reflection; whether you keep repeating the same mistakes or learn from experience—these are important factors that not only determine how effective you are in what you do, but also affect the very nature of the initiatives you are willing to undertake in life.

Reflections

If we observe carefully the trends of thought and action that shape society, we easily reach the conclusion that for the past few decades, a particular culture or worldview has become increasingly more dominant and is gaining momentum as it expands. This culture of consumerism, as many have called it, is centered on the individual, placing great emphasis on the satisfaction of personal needs and desires. It perceives the acquisition of goods and material benefits as almost synonymous to happiness. It deifies the market and sees its invisible hand in all aspects of life, to the point that every relationship is reduced to a contractual one revolving around the buying and selling of things, ideas, and feelings, including a special brand of transcendence.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this worldview cannot be idealistic. Its proponents are most concerned with the pursuit of happiness, happiness that they sincerely wish to extend to the whole of humankind. It is not difficult, then, to imagine a highly altruistic person, whose ideas are largely shaped by this culture, some explicitly and some in more subtle ways. Let us consider such a person of noble aspirations who greatly desires the welfare of humanity and explore some of the elements of his or her conceptual framework. Could you describe briefly the views of this person on each of the following:

- 1 ← The nature of man
 - The nature of society
- 1 ← The purpose of life
- 1-2 ← The way humanity has evolved
- 2 ← World economy
- 2 ← The relationship between science and religion → he thinks spirituality (morality) is his doing and praying only in house and don't any attention to the
- 2 ← The meaning and purpose of education
- 2 ← The role of technology in the future of humanity
- 3 ← Family life → his priority is only his family.
- 3,4 ← Community
 - Work
- 3 ← Privacy
 - Freedom

our freedom ends when the others freedom is start

Theme 1:

Introducing Baha'i beliefs into our conversations on current issues

Study case 1 - Peace

1. Imagine a situation where a few friends begin discussing the Iraq conflict. One member of your group is *for* the intervention in Iraq while the other is strongly opposed. You will of course not participate in a political discussion. Rather, you will try to introduce with wisdom the Baha'i concept of peace. The following presentation taken from a course entitled "Constructing a Conceptual Framework for Social Action" might prove useful as a starting point for your discourse.

2. Prepare an outline of the ideas that you would use in your conversation with these friends.

peace - unity - friendship - / war creates destruction, bloodshed people lose their families
of mankind / we lose our knowledge and energy and money.

3. With a small group, take turns role-playing the above situation.

In general, while we recognize the grave dangers that threaten society in the years immediately ahead, our long-term vision of humanity's future is most optimistic. It is our conviction that peace is not only possible but inevitable. *The Promise of World Peace* describes this position in unequivocal terms:

The Great Peace towards which people of good will throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations. For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet—in the words of one great thinker, the "planetization of mankind."

Peace for us is not just the absence of war but a state of being governed by spiritual principles, particularly those of unity and justice. The causes of war, therefore, are to be found in the structures and processes of an unjust society that refuses to consider its members as belonging to one family. A comprehensive program to bring about peace must, on the one hand, include measures to abolish structures, attitudes and habits that encourage such social ills as racism, unrestrained nationalism, religious prejudice, and discrimination against women, and on the other, promote the creation and maintenance of institutions that uphold justice and guarantee all members of society equitable access to its resources. The statement below written soon after World War II supports this view:

It would be idle, however, to contend that the war, with all the losses it involved, the passions it aroused and the grievances it left behind, has solely been responsible for the unprecedented confusion into which almost every section of the civilized world is plunged at present. Is it not a fact—and this is the central idea I desire to emphasize—that the fundamental cause of this world unrest is attributable, not so much to the consequences of what must sooner or later come to be regarded as a transitory dislocation in the affairs of a continually changing world, but rather to the failure of those into whose hands the immediate destinies of peoples and nations have been committed, to adjust their system of economic and political institutions to the imperative needs of a rapidly evolving age? Are not these intermittent crises that convulse present-day society due primarily to the lamentable inability of the world's recognized leaders to read aright the signs of the times, to rid themselves once for all of their preconceived ideas and fettering creeds, and to reshape the machinery of their respective governments according to those standards that are implicit in Baha'u'llah's supreme declaration of the Oneness of Mankind—the chief and distinguishing feature of the Faith He proclaimed.

Study case 2 - The Oneness of Humankind

1. In the context of social action, the text below, taken from "Constructing a Conceptual Framework for Social Action", gives us many ideas on how to present the subject of the oneness of humanity. What are the main elements that are included in this presentation? Draw up a list and discuss the different items in your group.
2. With your group, discuss and enumerate several situations in which it would be appropriate to introduce the concept of the oneness of humankind.
3. How does our concept of history and the evolution of mankind fit into our belief in the oneness of humanity?
4. Discuss the following quote from the Universal House of Justice and present it in your words to your group.

"Regard the world as the human body," wrote Baha'u'llah to Queen Victoria. We can surely regard the Baha'i world, the army of God, in the same way. In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God "has endowed each humble being with ability and talent," and is supremely true of the body of the Baha'i world community, for this body is already an organism, united in its aspirations, unified in its methods, seeking assistance and confirmation from the same Source, and illumined with the conscious knowledge of its unity. Therefore, in this organic, divinely guided, blessed, and illumined body the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown to us. For extensive and deep as has been the sharing in the glorious work of the Cause, who would claim that every single believer has succeeded in finding his or her fullest satisfaction in the life of the Cause? The Baha'i world community, growing like a healthy new body, develops new cells, new organs, new functions and powers as it presses on to its maturity, when every soul, living for the Cause of God, will receive from that Cause, health, assurance, and the overflowing bounties of Baha'u'llah which are diffused through His divinely ordained Order.

The hallmark of the age of maturity will be the unification of the human race. The principle of the oneness of humankind is not a mere expression of a romantic notion of brotherly love or the praise of some vague ideal of tolerance and respect. It is not a summons to uniformity. It has nothing in common with the aggressive advance of a superficial culture that idolizes the unfettered gratification of desire and that, in the name of universality, devours every culture it encounters.

To believe in the oneness of humanity, as advocated here, implies the rejection of theories that explain the collective life of human beings in families, groups, tribes, cities, and nations solely in terms of the imperatives of survival. Rather, the evolution of such collective life and its institutions is viewed as a gradual unfoldment of the potentialities of the human spirit. This evolutionary process will attain a stage of fulfilment when humanity is at last able to undertake the task of laying foundations for a unified and advanced civilization. Progress towards such a goal demands rapid and organic change in the very structure of society, accompanied by an equally profound change in human consciousness. ^{→ of individuals}

Efforts to understand the operation of this principle should bear in mind that oneness must necessarily express itself in infinite variety. Diversity and oneness are complementary and

inseparable. Diversity does not invariably give rise to enmity and opposition. The differences of ethnicity, nationality, and race that exist today can be appreciated in the context of a historical process that has entailed progressive stages of unity. Differences that are perceived as causes of division and conflict should in fact be treated as sources of stability. Diversity brings enormous strength to the composition of the whole as unification occurs.

Gradual awareness of the significance of interconnectedness in the workings of the universe is arising not only from religious and philosophical, but also from scientific observation. Several advances in the past decades, for example, in understanding the evolution of biological and learning systems, in ecology, and in the study of the cosmos and its tiniest particles, have made obsolete a worldview that was founded on the mechanics of a clock and the interactions of billiard balls. Development thinking must similarly be challenged to leave behind visions of society that have originated in minds given to fragmentation, and seek in emerging scientific paradigms the ideas and the tools it needs to perform its tasks. B.R. and D
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The analogy that seems to demonstrate the operation of the principle of oneness in society is the human body. Within that system, millions of cells, with an extraordinary diversity of forms and functions, collaborate to make the existence of a human being possible. They give and receive whatever is needed for their individual function as well as the growth and welfare of the totality. No one would try to explain the life of a healthy body in terms of some of the principles we use so freely in our social theories, for instance, competition among the parts for scarce resources. The principle that governs the functioning of the body is cooperation. But this is not cooperation without a purpose—existence for the sake of existence. The outcome of this complex set of interactions is a system that serves as the temple of the soul. The rational faculty appears, and intelligence, a quality that seems to be present deep in the structure of the universe, manifests itself. Could not society also become the arena for harmonious interactions among human beings, interactions whose purpose is not the mere enjoyment of a few fleeting moments on this earth, but the appearance of a higher form—human civilization?

Viewed in this way the principle of the oneness of humankind would enter development discourse at three levels. The first would be at the level of policy and direction. That which furthers separateness, consolidates isolation, and strengthens the ascendancy of one group of people over others—even in the guise of unity and globalization—can hardly be considered development. The second would be at the level of approach and methodology. Development understood as extending prosperity to all cannot be advanced through the glorification of conflict, whether of class or ideology. Nor can the pursuit of selfish aims and competition be considered the organizing principle of society and the only path to excellence, although one may accept that ideas and products should be allowed to compete with one another. Excellence will be achieved if the noble qualities of the human soul are allowed to flourish in the environment of freedom created by cooperation.

The third level at which the influence of the principle of oneness would have to be felt is that of programme activity. The cementing together of human hearts and the progressive achievement of unity of purpose, unity of thought, and unity of action must be incorporated in both the goals and the methods of development projects, so, too, have to be measures that promote the integration of peoples everywhere into a growing network of global relations. It is in this sense, I believe, that the well-known phrase "Think globally, act locally" takes on true significance.

Study case 3 – Equality of Men and Women

1. Imagine a situation in which you and a group of friends are discussing recent European legislation regarding the veil. One of the elements of our evolving conceptual framework is our strong belief in the equality of men and women. At some stage in the conversation it might be fitting to introduce this concept. Read through the following essay taken from the book "Constructing a Conceptual Framework for Social Action" and make a list of its main ideas.

There can be no doubt that the equality of men and women will be a distinguishing characteristic of the civilization destined to emerge from the present passage through an age of transition. The challenge is to ensure that, on the one hand, the principle is permitted to give direction to development strategy and, on the other, its translation into proper structures and attitudes is accepted as an integral goal of specific projects.

Acknowledging that the equality of men and women is an elementary spiritual principle closes all those arguments that, overtly or in subtle ways, sustain the notion of the superiority of men. To promote, as an element of religious belief, the conviction that the soul of the human being has no sex—as is the case with race and colour—is to attack the very foundations of the age-old prejudice against women. Science, of course, does much to shatter erroneous belief. But history is replete with examples of entire peoples who readily accepted error as scientific truth because their inherited preferences inclined them to do so.

Unfortunately, so far as the treatment of women is concerned, the record of most major religions has been anything but impressive. To denounce religion as the perpetrator of inequality between women and men, however, is not justified. Religious teaching has been progressive, certain elements of it addressing only the historical reality of the people among which it was promulgated. These have to be understood in the context of an ongoing process through which spiritual truth has been brought progressively to bear on the challenges of civilization.

Contemporary society is ill-served by a prevailing tendency to relegate certain principles, even after their value has been acknowledged, largely to the realm of rhetoric and academic discussion. If the principle of the equality of women and men is not to meet this fate, it must be given sustained expression through the adoption of one goal: ensuring that men and women should work shoulder to shoulder in all fields of human endeavour—scientific, political, economic, social, and cultural—with the same rewards and in equal conditions. For the vast majority of women in the world the most immediate implication of such a goal must be to make education available to them, an education that is of the same scientific quality as that being offered to men, and it is therefore of great significance that the education of the girl-child is finally being recognized internationally as an indispensable theme of policy. The seriousness of this commitment can be appreciated in the care being exercised that emphasis on the education of women is accompanied by educational measures needed to change the attitudes of men.

Attitudinal change alone, however welcome, is only part of the answer in a society that is organized according to past prejudices. The principle of the equality of men and women has profound implications for the changes of structure that will characterize humanity's coming of age. It is no exaggeration to claim that the rigorous application of this principle will revolutionize every institution of society, from the family to government, from the smallest productive unit to large financial organizations, from structures that support individual creativity to the most complex channels for the collective expression of culture. For the objective is not the mere

opening of opportunities to women to do everything that men do today, so much of which is shameful and cruel. Such a principle sheds light on how the true qualities of the human soul are to govern social existence. It is a statement about human reality. Its application is a requisite for the establishment of peace, a definite move away from violence, an exigency of a long-awaited spiritual civilization. Without it, development simply will not occur.

2. Prepare a small presentation on the subject of the equality of men and women basing yourself on the list that you previously prepared. Take turns presenting to each other the talk you will prepare. You may wish to read the following quotes from Abdu'l-Baha before proceeding.

When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife.

(Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 175)

Know thou, O handmaid, that in the sight of Baha, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favoured, whether man or woman.

(Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 79)

The world of humanity has two wings, as it were: One is the female; the other is the male. If one wing be defective, the strong perfect wing will not be capable of flight.

(Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 174)

He declared that as all are created in the image and likeness of the one God, there is no distinction as to sex in the estimation of God. He who is purest in heart, whose knowledge exceeds and who excels in kindness to the servants of God, is nearest and dearest to the Lord, our Creator, irrespective of sex.

(Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 394)

Study Case 4 - Justice

1. A seeker with whom you have become acquainted has expressed on several occasions his concerns about the dire situation of the impoverished masses of humanity and the countless injustices that exist in the world today. On a previous occasion he had described his involvement with an NGO that is active in Kosovo and has projects in the field of education. You have invited him to your home to further discuss the Baha'i Faith and he was delighted to hear that the discussion theme would be justice. Read through the following small excerpt from an essay on justice in the context of Baha'i inspired social and economic development. In it you will find several important ideas related to justice as a spiritual principle. Make a list of the main ideas present in the text and discuss them in your group.

To say that justice must be a fundamental concern of development strategy is to express a truism. There is, however, little agreement on the means by which justice can be worked into actual plans and promoted in action. Recognizing that justice is primarily a spiritual principle, an exigency of

the human spirit, helps overcome the difficulty and opens doors to possibilities that are not available when discussion is limited to the distribution of income or the rule of democracy. As the concept is not applicable to the web of connections that define the animal kingdom, justice is irrefutably a requirement of a life that transcends animal existence. Beyond mere concern with social issues, justice as a spiritual principle touches the individual at the deepest level of consciousness. Its influence motivates participation, raises awareness to new levels, and empowers individuals, communities, and institutions.

The spiritual roots of the principle are to be found in that faculty of the human soul which enables us to see with our own eyes and not with the eyes of others. The cultivation of this faculty creates in the individual the responsibility to investigate reality free from the chains of tradition perpetuated through imitation. When sufficiently developed, it protects the individual, for example, from being a naive victim of market propaganda, constantly induced to buy things, services, and ideology. The elimination of such credulity is, clearly, a requirement of a development process that calls for the participation of the people in tracing their own path of collective advancement.

Understood as a spiritual principle justice helps policymakers avoid the pitfalls of uniformity while still respecting the exigencies of equity. The analogy of the human body discussed in relation to the ideal of oneness takes on new meaning when examined in the light of this principle. Rather than defining relationships among the members of society in terms of a sameness foreign to the very structure of creation, one is moved to see individual and collective well-being as the result of the intricate operations of a system that measures needs, aspirations, talents, motivations, and performances, and rewards all equitably. When appropriately brought to bear on social issues, justice is the single most important instrument for the establishment of unity.

Without justice, the goals of development become distorted. They either are dictated by the interests of dominant ideologies and powerful groups or represent simply no more than the beliefs, admittedly often rooted in altruism, of those who work professionally in the development field. Consider how loudly the praise of defective approaches to globalization is sung and how much effort is expended on covering up the resulting marginalization of the masses. Review the thousands of projects that have set out to alleviate poverty but have merely succeeded in offering a small group of beneficiaries a few advantages while the gap between the rich and the poor in the area under their influence has continued to widen. Surely, at every stage of activity—from the formulation of policies, to the design of programmes, to the implementation of specific projects—the principle of justice has to be made the final arbiter.

2. In preparation for your discussion, make a list of ideas that you want to share with this person. You may also wish to read the quotes of Baha'u'llah that are included below.

O SON OF SPIRIT!

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

(Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words)

It beseecheth you to fix your gaze under all conditions upon justice and fairness.

(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 36)

The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men.

(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 66)

Justice and equity are twin Guardians that watch over men. From them are revealed such blessed and perspicuous words as are the cause of the well-being of the world and the protection of the nations.

(Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 12)

By the righteousness of God! Justice is a powerful force. It is, above all else, the conqueror of the citadels of the hearts and souls of men, and the revealer of the secrets of the world of being, and the standard-bearer of love and bounty.

(Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 31)

Study case 5 - Human Rights

1. The subject of human rights is one that we are confronted with regularly and provides many opportunities to introduce the Baha'i teachings. The following essay by Mathew Weinberg will help you in your analysis of the subject. As in the other workshops, make a list of the main ideas that are presented.
2. Based on the essay, prepare in your own words a small talk on Human Rights. Take turns practicing with your group.

More than a century ago, Baha'u'llah not only anticipated the rise of the human rights movement, but provided an underlying moral and spiritual framework upon which to view human rights in the modern age—a period He described as the "stage of human maturity." His vision of a unified global community gives central consideration to the safeguarding and enhancement of the rights of all human beings.

In addressing the world's rulers Baha'u'llah warns: "If ye stay not the hand of the oppressor, if ye fail to safeguard the rights of the down-trodden, what right have ye then to vaunt yourselves among men?" And: "They that perpetrate tyranny in the world have usurped the rights of the peoples and kindreds of the earth and are sedulously pursuing their selfish inclinations."

He further elucidates the essential requirements of just governance:

It behoveth every ruler to weigh his own being every day in the balance of equity and justice and then to judge between men and counsel them to do that which would direct their steps unto the path of wisdom and understanding. This is the cornerstone of statesmanship and the essence thereof. From these words every enlightened man of wisdom will readily perceive that which will foster such aims as the welfare, security and protection of mankind and the safety of human lives.

In exhorting His followers to the path of justice, Baha'u'llah declares:

Thou must show forth that which will ensure the peace and the well-being of the miserable and the down-trodden. Gird up the loins of thine endeavor, that perchance thou mayest release the captive from his chains, and enable him to attain unto true liberty.

Justice is, in this day, bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath the yoke of oppression. The thick clouds of tyranny have darkened the face of the earth, and enveloped its peoples.

Baha'u'llah not only addresses human rights issues in general terms, but condemns and prohibits specific practices such as slavery. His strong censure of two great European powers for the persecution of their Jewish populations, represented, in a sense, an early example of the principle of external intervention into the affairs of a sovereign state, a concept that has received considerable currency only recently. Indeed, all of His epistles and pronouncements to the governors of human society could be regarded as such.

In the writings of Baha'u'llah the voice of the Creator speaks to the fundamental equality of all: "Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other." And: "Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world has been laid waste. It hath become desolate... Indeed, man is noble, inasmuch as each one is a repository of the sign of God. Nevertheless, to regard oneself as superior in knowledge, in learning or virtue, or to exalt oneself or seek preference, is a grievous transgression."

So in 'Abdu'l-Baha's words: "Baha'u'llah taught that an equal standard of human rights must be recognized and adopted. In the estimation of God all men are equal: there is no distinction or preferment for any soul in the dominion of His justice and equity."

That the standard of justice established by Baha'u'llah is applicable to all members of the human race is made abundantly clear by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, in a letter to members of the Baha'i community in 1925:

[Baha'is] should have the most scrupulous regard to safeguarding the legitimate personal and civil rights of all individuals, whatever may be their chosen career or station in life, and irrespective of their racial, religious or ideological backgrounds. It is not permissible in matters related to such rights to make distinctions and discriminations or show preferences. In all transactions and dealings that affect basic human rights, the standard required of the chosen supporters of Baha'u'llah—a standard that must claim their unhesitating and unreserved acceptance, and which they must meticulously and assiduously uphold—is that they should not make the slightest distinction between friend and stranger, believer and unbeliever, supporter and antagonist.

The Baha'i commitment to justice is an essential and tangible expression of faith. In contrast to the secular liberal theory that gave rise to the present human rights regime, the Baha'i teachings ground human rights in what is regarded as the objective spiritual nature of the human person. "I knew My love for thee," is the Divine assurance, "therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty." A loving Creator exists Who is the Source of all that is. It is not simply because human beings have the capacity for rational choice that they deserve moral protection, as modern philosophic liberalism would claim, but that they are spiritual beings

who have the capacity to reflect Divine attributes such as love, creativity, and charity. As the 1947 statement of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada eloquently affirmed: "The source of human rights is the endowment of qualities, virtues and powers which God has bestowed upon mankind without discrimination of sex, race, creed or nation. To fulfill the possibilities of this divine endowment is the purpose of existence." In short, human beings must be free in order to discover and know God: "...to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves." This process of spiritual discovery and development is the essence of life itself. The innate and fundamental aspiration to investigate reality is thus not only the right but the obligation of every human being. And it is for this very reason that 'Abdu'l-Baha states that the "conscience of man is sacred and to be respected..."

Theme 2 Involvement of seekers in the study circles

Study cases:

1. You have been having conversations with several of your friends about the Faith and they are interested. In fact they seem interested in all religions and philosophies and are willing to find out about everything. One day you are talking one of these friends who has already been to several Baha'i devotional meetings and loves the Bahá'í Writings.

You ask your friend whether they would like to find out more about the Writings by participating in the course "Reflections on the Life of the Spirit" which you can facilitate, and your friend says "That sounds interesting, can you tell me more about it?"

What will you say?

2. Another of your friends is studying history and politics, and is very concerned about the state of the world, especially the inability of governments to achieve positive changes. He comes from a Christian family and he does feel that the spiritual side of life is important. Though he has not been to any Baha'i meetings, you have discussed some of the Baha'i ideas with him and he says they are very like his own beliefs. You want to invite him to join the study circle. What will you say?

3. Just a few months after her presentation of the Faith to her friend, Anna is inviting Emilia and her brother Emil to join a Book 1 study circle. She is at their home.

She says: "Emil and Emilia, you know that I went on a course to be a study circle tutor during the summer holidays?"

Emil says "Yes, I do know because Emilia taught all the children's classes for you while you were away and she persuaded me to help her."

Anna says "Well, now that I have been trained, I would like to start a study circle group to do the course 'Reflections on the life of the spirit'. I want to invite you both to join it."

Emilia says "Definitely. How about you, Emil?"

Emilia says "I think so, but is the course difficult? When helping with the children I found the Baha'i Writings are beautiful but there are some quite difficult words."

Anna says "No, the course is not at all difficult, but very inspiring. It is the first of a sequence of courses, and it is an excellent way to investigate the Writings of Baha'u'llah for yourself. It will help you to decide for yourself whether you would like to enrol as a Baha'i like your sister has. We have discussed the importance of investigating the truth for ourselves, rather than blindly following the religion of our ancestors. Baha'u'llah said "see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others", and He has given each of us the responsibility to read and think about His Writings for ourselves. In this course the very first section is called 'Understanding the Baha'i Writings.'

We will investigate the Writings together and learn from each other in the group, and I won't be like a teacher at all. I will be learning along with everyone, facilitating and guiding the group through the course and making sure that everyone enjoys it and learns at their own pace. The method of study is very uplifting and energising. The course involves reading quotations, asking questions about what they mean for our lives, sharing our thoughts, and doing creative things together to help us think more deeply about the concepts. We will take time to socialise and enjoy being together too."

Emilia says "It sounds really interesting. I would love to learn how to understand the Baha'i Writings better. I felt quite overwhelmed when you told me all about the Covenant of Baha'u'llah and I do want to learn all about the Faith and how to share it with my friends now that I am a Baha'i. Emil, why don't you join us? We can invite your friend David to come along too."

Questions:

Which of the following do you agree with?

- ☒ a. Anna is too direct in her invitation to Emilia and Emil. She ought not to emphasize that the course is based on the Writings. It would be better to give more emphasis to the social and creative aspects of the course.
- ☒ b. Anna should have explained clearly that the course is not intended to make you into a Baha'i because we do not try to convert people. Otherwise El-nil will feel under pressure and he won't want to come.
- ☒ c. Anna was wise to use the quotation from Baha'u'llah about the importance of investigating for ourselves. This will help Emil and Emilia to understand the spirit of the study circle courses, and they will see that they have been invited to make up their own minds about things.
- ☒ d. Anna has not explained that the course takes about 30 to 35 hours and that they should not miss any sessions. She should mention these things at the start. *and it depends.*
- ☒ e. It was not a good idea to mention the sequence of courses. That will put people off because they will think this is too serious. *it depends.*
- ☒ f. By inviting her friends to learn more about the Baha'i Writings, Anna has given a very honest and clear picture of what the course is about, and has offered the best motivation for attending. Since they are already attracted to the beauty of the Writings, this was a good idea.

4. Several of your friends responded positively to your invitation to do the Book 1 course, and you are preparing for the introductory meeting of the study circle. You have consulted with some other tutors who have conducted study circles for non-Baha'is and they have told you that it is important to convey as clearly as you can the nature and purpose of the course, because if the participants get a false impression, they might start the course and then become disappointed and leave after one or two sessions.

Thinking about the first session, you have decided that you want to give them a flavour of the study circle atmosphere as well as clear information about what to expect in the course.

What will you do at the first meeting:

- a) To give them the information they need.
- b) To give them a flavour or feeling of the study circle.

5. You have learned from other tutors that it is very helpful to have at least one other Baha'i to join the study circle, to help nurture the seekers. How will your Baha'i friend or friends contribute to the study circle? What is their role?

Theme 3 Different aspects of tutoring

6. After the introductory session one or two of your participants have decided that they do not want to join the study circle. You felt a little disappointed at first but your area coordinator told you that this usually happens, it happens with many courses and it is nothing to do with your ability as a facilitator. You feel encouraged, and at the same time a bit nervous when a smaller but very enthusiastic group comes together for the next gathering. It begins well, you have divided the group into pairs to work on the questions in section 2 of Unit 1, and lively discussion is going on.

What are the benefits of dividing the group into pairs or small groups? *save the time*
ely people can speak
involving all the participant
speak more about our opinion

7. When the groups reach question 5 of section 2 there are different reactions among the groups of participants. One pair calls you over, and ask "do Baha'is drink alcohol?" You answer "no", so they tick the "False" box and move on to the next question without further discussion.

Another pair has engaged in a discussion about the rights and wrongs of drinking alcohol, and

want to know why Baha'is don't drink, since they say Christians even drink wine as part of the church services. You have prepared for this session by reviewing Anna's beautiful presentation of this Baha'i law in the context of the nobility of man, and you are also able to quote the exact words of Baha'u'llah to give the reason. "It is inadmissible that man, who hath been endowed with reason, should consume that which stealeth it away." This quotation proves very powerful and convincing, but for two or three of the participants the discussion is obviously one that could go on all night. What do you do?

8. During Unit 2 your friends have been deeply touched by what they have learned about prayer. You have observed certain changes in some of them, and it seems that the practice of prayer is having an effect on their lives. This is very confirming, as it shows the power of the Word of God to influence hearts.

When you reach Unit 2 section 8 someone asks "What is the Covenant of God?"

Fortunately, you have prepared in advance for this session and you have reviewed the section in Book 2 about the eternal Covenant of God. You are also aware from a discussion at a recent tutor encounter, that this concept is important for the participants to grasp, since they will be asked to reflect on their relationship to the eternal Covenant at the end of the course.

How do you answer this question? *say in the different days.*

Theme 4 Nurturing seekers and inviting them to join the Cause

9. Your study circle group is coming to the end of the course. There is a feeling that they are eager to complete the course, not because they are tired of it but because there will be a good feeling of achievement at reaching the end.

You are concerned about the very last section: Unit 3 section 18. In a recent tutor encounter when there was consultation about the importance of this last section and its importance. It gives an opportunity for each participant to reflect on the meaning for his or her own life of some very profound truths that they have discovered. It is important for seekers, because it asks them to stop and think how they will choose to respond to Baha'u'llah. You feel that this section needs to be approached with thought and creativity. Your group have responded very well throughout the course whenever you introduced creative activities such as writing poetry or painting. Can you think of a creative activity that will help you to give this section the full attention it needs, and give everyone the opportunity for deep reflection on the questions? *we must find some real situation in the daily life / some story - some Drama.*

10. Several of your good friends have completed the Book 1 course with you. During that time you not only studied together, but you also spent time together socially, and held special firesides for them to spend more time on certain topics that came up during the study circle.

Each participant is on your prayer list, and you pray for them daily. You also think about each of them, and try to understand what will draw their heart closer to Baha'u'llah.

All of this has convinced you that two of your friends are actually ready to be Baha'is, but neither of them has said that they want to enrol in the Baha'i community.

After attending a deepening with one of the assistants on inviting seekers to embrace the Cause, you decide that you need to invite your friends to enrol as Baha'is.

"What are your feelings when you think about doing this?"

11. After much thought and prayer, you invite one of your friends who is rather a thoughtful, quiet person to come for a walk with you to a big park that you both love to visit. During your walk, while you are resting for a while in a beautiful spot you say: "Today I want to offer you an invitation. I feel a bit shy about asking you this. It has been really great doing the study circle

together, and you said to me that you read the Baha'i prayers every day and try to live according to the Baha'i teachings. I want to invite you, if you feel ready, to join the Baha'i community. It would make us all very happy. Your friend is silent for a while and then says: "Thank you for inviting me. That is really nice. I have been thinking about it, to be honest, but I didn't really know what a person does to join the Baha'is, or what the qualifications are. I do believe that Baha'u'llah is God's latest Messenger." Your friend then smiles, looks at you and says: "Does that make me a Baha'i then?" What will you answer?

12. There is another friend that you are determined to invite into the Faith. He is quite a straightforward person who loves to discuss everything, and is very close to another Baha'i friend, who attended the study circle and has been of great help in the various firesides: devotional meetings, and social activities that have been going on at the same time. You invite both of these friends to your room for dinner one evening. You have taken extra care with the meal and made the room really tidy. You even brought some flowers.

Your friend says, after the meal, how special it was and then you say: "One reason that I wanted to have a special evening with you is because I wanted the chance to discuss with you how you feel about the Baha'i Faith. Maybe you think I'm rather bold, but I really want you to know that if you believe that Baha'u'llah is God's latest Messenger, then you are welcome to enrol in the Baha'i World community. I would love to know how you feel about that."

Your friend understands that this means a lot to you both. He says: "I really appreciate your invitation. Something I love about your faith is that you are never pushy, but you are always welcoming. I would still like to come along to the Baha'i activities but I don't think I can ever be a Baha'i."

What do you say?

why?

13. Although you tried to be detached, you felt suddenly very disappointed when your friend said he did not think he could be a Baha'i. Still, you want to help your friend to reach the goal of his life. While calling in your heart for help from the Concourse on High you say: "Is there anything in particular that hinders you from being a Baha'i?"

"Yes", says your friend. "It is to do with the high standards that a Baha'i must live up to.

I am quite sure that I will never be able to live up to them."

The rest of the evening is spent in a long discussion of this topic. Two weeks later your friend has finally understood that he doesn't need to be perfect, and decides to enrol as a Baha'i.

What did you and your Baha'i friend say to help him?

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